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The Control of Chicken Mites and Lice

Abstract

The two very common parasites, the chicken mite and the chicken louse, are responsible for a very large part of the loss suffered annually by poultry raisers, yet they may be dealt with effectively.

The symptoms for these two pests are much alike. In severe cases they are as follows: The head and comb become pale, the bird looks sickly, its feathers become ruined and may drop out, it becomes dumpy and thin, and, if it is a female; It may stop laying. Sitting hens may leave the nest; sometimes they die from the effects of these parasites. Generally, the fowls may be seen picking at their feathers as if to remove the insects.

To make sure of the presence of either lice or mites, catch the birds and examine them. The lice may be found on them either day or night; the mites usually attack the chickens at night only and during the day stay in cracks in the poultry house as well as in the droppings.

The following descriptions will help the poultry raiser to determine which of the pests is attacking his chickens.

Keywords

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THE CONTROL OF CHICKEN MITES AND LICE

By R. M. SHERWOOD, Assistant Professor of Poultry Husbandry.

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The symptoms for these two pests are much alike. In severe cases they are as follows: The head and comb become pale, the bird looks sickly, its feathers become ruffled and may drop out, it becomes dumplish and thin, and, if it is a female, it may stop laying. Sitting hens may leave the nest; sometimes they die from the effects of these parasites. Generally, the fowls may be seen picking at their feathers as if to remove the insects.

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The following descriptions will help the poultry raiser to determine which of the pests is attacking his chickens:

THE CHICKEN MITE—DESCRIPTION AND HABITS.

The chicken mite (*Dermanyssus gallinae*), or "red mite," as it is sometimes called, is a small parasite about 1-25 to 1-20 of an inch in length. It is broader in proportion to its length than the chicken louse. The mite is naturally gray in color with dark spots, but after it has visited the fowl and has gorged itself with blood it takes on a reddish appearance. This explains why many people speak of the "red" and the "gray" mite. This insect has sharp mouth parts which it inserts into the flesh of the fowl at night to feed on the blood, returning for the day to cracks in the perches and building, also to any filth in the house. There are at least two exceptions to this habit, namely: in the case of sitting hens and also in the entire flock when the infestation is very bad. Then the mites may stay on the fowl the entire 24 hours. Mites lay their eggs in cracks about the perches and wall, also in the droppings. The young hatch out in a few days and grow rapidly for ten days when they are mature.

Treatment: Since mites leave the fowls by day and breed in cracks and filth, the methods of getting rid of them are simple. Clean up all filth and thoroughly disinfect the building and fixtures with one of the disinfectants described later. Repeat the treatment as often as necessary. Where the droppings are removed often and the house kept clean, there is much less trouble from mites. Sunlight, cleanliness and ventilation are three excellent preventatives.

THE CHICKEN LOUSE—DESCRIPTION AND HABITS.

The chicken louse (*Menopon pallidum*) is pale yellow to gray in color, about one-twentieth inch in length, and rather slender. It spends most of its time on the fowl, although occasionally found in the nest. The eggs or nits are found on the down feathers of the fowl, especially around the vent. They hatch in six to ten days into small pale colored lice. These are very active and at

once irritate the fowls. They feed on scabs and secretions from the skin, also parts of feathers. They do not have piercing mouth parts and therefore do not suck blood. The young lice mature quickly. They undergo 10 or 12 moults before reaching the adult or full grown state. Lice breed very rapidly. In eight weeks the third generation is mature and if all lived the offspring of a single pair of lice up to and including the third generation would number as high as 125,000 individuals. Therefore where poor management is practised, lice give enough trouble to cause unthriftiness and even death in the flock.

Treatment: As lice spend their entire life on the fowl, the treatment must reach them on the fowl, as well as disinfect the house. Two methods are common: Dusting fowls and using paste or ointment. Some dip their chickens, but this is not good for the fowls, and it requires much attention afterwards to prevent colds and other troubles of the respiratory tract. For that reason that method is not recommended. Dusting has long been used by most poultry raisers. The fowls are allowed to dust themselves in any wallow they may select and in addition to this the sitting hens and any other which may need any special treatment are given a thorough dusting of some good louse powder.

A number of good powders are on the market, including pyrethrum, but most of them are too expensive for large numbers of fowls. The home made powder given in this circular is very satisfactory and not expensive. Fowls should be given a second dusting about a week after the first to kill any lice which hatch from eggs laid before the first treatment was given.

The third method, namely the use of salves, or ointments, is becoming more popular. Such ointments as those made of equal parts of lard and cottonseed oil have been used on young chicks; mercuric ointment is used for mature fowls.

LICE AND MITE EXTERMINATORS.

Liquids.

Cresol Soap. Dissolve a ten cent cake of laundry soap in one pint soft water; heat or allow to stand until soap paste is formed. Add one pint cresol; beat or allow to stand until soap paste is dissolved. Stir in one gallon of kerosene. Dilute with ten to fifty parts of water and apply with spray pump or broom.

Cresol-Kerosene Paint. To three parts of kerosene add one part of cresol. Apply with brush as a paint.

White wash. Slack one peck of lime and dilute to 40 gallons. Add two pounds of salt and one gallon of a good stock dip. Apply with a spray pump.

Government White Wash. $\frac{1}{2}$ bushel unslaked lime—slake with warm water and cover during the process to keep in the steam. Strain the liquid through a fine sieve or strainer; add a peck of salt, previously dissolved in warm water, 3 pounds of ground rice boiled to a thin paste and stir in boiling hot 1.2 pounds of powdered Spanish Whiting and 1 pound of glue which has been previously dissolved over a slow fire. Add 5 gallons of hot water to the mixture, stir well and let it stand for a few days covered from the dirt. Apply with a brush while hot. One pint will cover a square yard.

Louse Powders.

I. 3 parts gasoline, 1 part cresol.

Mix together and add as much plaster of paris or land plaster as the above mixture will moisten. Allow to dry and apply liberally to fowls. This is rather strong for young chicks.

II. Pyrethrum powder may be purchased at drug stores and used to dust small flocks. It is somewhat expensive and loses its strength readily on being kept in the open for a short time.

Louse Ointment.

I. 1 part vaseline, 1 part mercuric ointment.

A piece about the size of a pea rubbed into the skin around the vent for body lice.

II. 1 part lard, 1 part sweet oil or cottonseed oil.

Applied sparingly to feathers of neck and under the wings for lice on chicks.